

AFFAIRS IN MEXICO—ALLEGED SHOOTING OF UNARMED
MEXICAN PRISONERS.

L E T T E R

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,

IN RESPONSE TO

A RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE OF JULY 16, 1914, STATING THAT COURT OF INQUIRY FINDS AND REPORTS THAT ALLEGATIONS MADE BY FRED L. BOALT, TO THE EFFECT THAT THE LAW OF FLIGHT AGAINST PRISONERS WAS APPLIED BY UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES AT VERA CRUZ, ARE FALSE.

JULY 20, 1914.—Referred to the Committee on Naval Affairs and ordered to be printed.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
Washington, July 20, 1914.

SIR: In reply to the Senate resolution dated July 16, 1914, I have the honor to inform the Senate in regard to the truth or falsity of a press report sent out from Vera Cruz, Mexico, and published in the United States, that an ensign in the United States Navy caused to be shot unarmed Mexican prisoners under the so-called Mexican "ley de fuga," as follows:

On June 24 this department received from the Hon. Mr. Kenneth D. McKellar, M. C., information to the effect that the Memphis Press had published a statement that the American forces in Mexico had shot prisoners.

This letter was, on June 25, forwarded to the Secretary of War for such action as he deemed it expedient to take. This was done because the War Department is in control at Vera Cruz, and this department could take no action.

On July 8 this department was informed by Mr. Gilson Gardner, Washington correspondent of the Newspaper Enterprise Association, that the article referred to an alleged shooting of prisoners by an ensign during the capture of Vera Cruz; that the correspondent is prepared to substantiate the essential statements made by him, and

that the correspondent, Fred L. Boalt, had been ordered deported in consequence of the article. Mr. Gardner was assured that the matter would receive immediate attention.

On July 9 Mr. Gilson Gardner again communicated with this department requesting the suspension of the order of deportation, pending an investigation. He also stated that he thought Mr. Boalt ought to be given opportunity to gather his evidence and present it to the court. I had no authority to grant his request, as Vera Cruz is under the control of the War Department; but at once addressed the following communication to the Secretary of War:

JULY 9, 1914.

SIR: I beg to inform you that I am cabling the commander in chief, United States Atlantic Fleet, Vera Cruz, Mexico, to investigate the truth of certain newspaper statements published over the name of Mr. Fred L. Boalt, a press correspondent, to the effect that prisoners had been shot by order of an ensign in the Navy during the taking of Vera Cruz, under what is commonly known as the law of flight. I am informed that Mr. Boalt is about to be deported from Vera Cruz, and I have to respectfully request that he be not deported therefrom until the investigation I have ordered shall have been completed, as his presence there would probably be most necessary toward getting at the full facts of his published statements.

Sincerely, yours,

JOSEPHUS DANIELS.

The SECRETARY OF WAR.

The Secretary of War at once complied with the request and telegraphed to Gen. Funston not to deport Mr. Boalt.

On July 9 the following quoted telegram was sent to the commander in chief, Atlantic Fleet:

Fully investigate published statements of Fred L. Boalt, correspondent, to the effect that during taking of Vera Cruz an ensign, apparently Richardson, on *Arkansas*, ordered shooting of prisoners under what is commonly known as law of flight. It is desired to fully clear the matter up. Interview Gen. Funston concerning investigation he may have already made, which may help you in the matter. Go to the bottom.

On July 9 the commander in chief, Atlantic Fleet, replied as follows:

Acknowledge department's directions regarding Boalt's statements. Court of inquiry meets to-morrow.

On July 16 the commander in chief, Atlantic Fleet, informed the department as follows:

Inquiry into allegations made by Fred L. Boalt, correspondent Newspaper Enterprise Association, concluded. Inquiry exhaustive and conclusively shows that Boalt's statements are false and that the law of flight against prisoners was not applied at Vera Cruz by the United States naval forces under any circumstances or at any time. Proceedings of court of inquiry will go forward to department by mail tug Sunday. Gen. Funston notified of result of inquiry.

The proceedings of the court of inquiry referred to above have not yet been received. As soon as they reach the department, a copy of the report will be forwarded.

Respectfully, yours,

JOSEPHUS DANIELS.

HON. JAMES M. BAKER,
Secretary of the United States Senate.